

WASHINGTON D.C - The end of Hispanic Heritage Month marked the beginning of a new mission and worthy goal. Yesterday, Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 31) introduced the much anticipated H.R. 3292, "The Commission to Establish the National Museum of the American Latino Act of 2003."

The bipartisan bill, which now awaits action in the House Resources Committee, was submitted with 28 initial co-sponsors, including Rep. Ciro Rodriguez (TX - 28), Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus; Rep. Solomon Ortiz (TX - 27), Chair of the CHC's Arts and Entertainment Task Force; the entire membership of the CHC; Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL - 18), chair of the Congressional Hispanic Conference; and Rep. Robert Matsui (CA - 5), who is a member of the Smithsonian's Board of Regents.

"Both native and foreign-born Latinos in the United States have influenced and enriched this country since our nation's founding and continue to make significant contributions in academia, the arts and the humanities, and in popular culture - to the benefit of all Americans," Rep. Becerra said. "These contributions and accomplishments should and must be recognized on a scale that is fitting of them."

If signed into law, the newly-formed "Commission to Establish the National Museum of the American Latino" would consist of 23 members chosen from a wide array of professional groups, including museum associations, academic institutions, and organizations committed to the research and study of American Latino life, art, history and culture. Seven of the 23 members of the commission would be appointed by the president, while the speaker of the House, the House minority leader, the Senate majority leader and the Senate minority leader would each

appoint three voting members and one non-voting member.

Charged with formulating a plan of action for the creation and maintenance of the museum, from the initial fundraising to the availability of the various possible collections that would be housed in the new museum, the commission's report would be due to Congress 18 months after the enactment of Rep. Becerra's legislation.

"The museum will serve as a reminder to all Americans of the numerous contributions that Hispanic Americans have made throughout our country's rich history," Rep. Ros-Lehtinen, the principal co-sponsor of Rep. Becerra's legislation, said. "Hispanic-Americans have been integral in shaping and influencing America and helping it to become the beacon of hope for all. Washington D.C. is a fitting place to house the Museum, as folks visiting our nation's Capitol will have the unique opportunity to learn about Hispanic-American's important role in our nation's history."

"If you take a walk down the National Mall, you will get as good a snapshot of America as you can find anywhere in this country," Rep. Becerra said. "Yet the lessons of our history, art and culture are still incomplete. When completed, the National Museum of the American Latino will be a welcome addition to the Smithsonian family. This process will not be a fast one - but it will be successful."